



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

Du Transcendentalisme considéré essentiellement dans sa définition et ses origines françaises. Par WILLIAM GIRARD. University of California Publications in Modern Philology, Vol. IV, No. 3 (October 18, 1916), pp. 351-498.

The subject of this monograph is so difficult of treatment that, if our knowledge is even slightly increased thereby, we should be grateful. How shall we derive from book sources an intuitional philosophy? And how define a movement that called itself indefinable? The subject is enormous as well as difficult. Mr. Girard apologizes for attempting so much, and probably most readers will feel that a survey of American thought down to 1840, together with argumentative summaries and comparisons of the transcendental thinking of England, Germany, and France, could hardly be given with much thoroughness in a hundred and fifty rather verbose pages.

The main thesis of the study concerns the derivation of the movement. Mr. Girard in his most conciliatory moments holds that the transcendentalists "ont retrouvé chez les grands idéalistes allemands un état d'âme qui était plus ou moins le leur, ce qui explique l'intérêt qu'ils portèrent à leur philosophie, tandis qu'ils ont emprunté aux spiritualistes français, en particulier, des formes qui se trouvèrent exprimer de la façon la plus satisfaisante, des idées et des conceptions qu'ils devaient beaucoup plus à ce qu'ils étaient eux-mêmes qu'à ce qu'avaient été les écrivains qu'ils lurent, apprécièrent et comprirent" (p. 357). In the heat of argument he seems at times to be defending a thesis much like Brownson's hasty statement: "Germany reaches us only through France" (p. 474). Consistently he aims to show that the influence of Germany on the movement has been much overestimated, while that of France has been neglected. His success is partial.

The method of the argument is open to severe criticism. Having given a historical survey of earlier American thought, Mr. Girard, after reaching 1825, drops the historical method and considers his facts in a topical arrangement that is not illuminating. No logical separation of the philosophical and the religious thinking of the group can be made. Mr. Girard's methods enable him, furthermore, to mistreat individuals easily. Not knowing what to make of Emerson, he obliterates him from the discussion.¹ He neglects Hedge's Germanism most unwarrantably.² He stresses Ripley's

¹ See pp. 383, note, 395, and 482, note.

² Cf. p. 397 with G. W. Cooke, *Introduction to the Dial*, II, 72-73.

choice of French material for the early volumes of his *Specimens of Foreign Literature*, but neglects entirely Ripley's controversy with Andrews Norton and the *Letters on the Latest Form of Infidelity* resulting from it. These little known letters are highly important in the history of transcendentalism, and they show an indisputable and strong German influence on Ripley's thinking. Casual journalistic utterances Mr. Girard sometimes takes with naïve seriousness, and seeming proofs are not always carefully weighed. In part proof of the proposition, "Que la philosophie des idéalistes allemands n'ait exercé, directement, aucune influence notable sur la pensée religieuse libérale de la Nouvelle-Angleterre," the following statements are made (p. 403): "G. Ripley nous déclare à son tour qu'il n'a rien lu de Kant et qu'il doit ce qu'il sait des doctrines de ce philosophe à l'un de ses interprètes anglais (*Dial*, II, 91). Margaret Fuller avoue ne rien comprendre à ce qu'elle lit de Fichte, quoiqu'elle étudie ce dernier d'après un traité destiné à en simplifier la doctrine, et se déclare, en outre, incapable de comprendre, dans son ensemble, le système de Jacobi." The *Dial* article here ascribed to Ripley is assigned by Cooke to J. A. Saxton;¹ on what ground does Mr. Girard assign it to Ripley? Frequent favorable references to Kant scattered through Ripley's work, together with the fact that he was an excellent scholar in German theology and possessed a good German library containing "much of Kant,"² would certainly tend to establish an acquaintance on his part with Kant. With regard to Miss Fuller the fact that she said she could not understand Fichte is far from proving that she was uninfluenced by him. A comic moment is reported³ when Mme de Staël upon meeting Fichte said: "Now, Mons. *Fichté*, could you be so kind as to give me, in fifteen minutes or so, a sort of idea or *aperçu* of your system, so that I may know clearly what you mean by your *ich*, your *moi*, for I am entirely in the dark about it." Although Mr. Girard seems to think that such statements as Miss Fuller's and Parker's (that Kant is most difficult reading; see p. 442) are evidence for lack of German influence on transcendentalism, they demonstrate, on the contrary, earnest American attempts to fathom German thought. If Americans had professed a clear understanding of German idealism, then indeed we should have reason to believe that they studied it second hand.

Mr. Girard is at his best when collecting evidence of American fondness for French philosophers. It is here that he gives us his most important results. And yet the present reviewer would interpret this evidence in a manner different from Mr. Girard's. The more aggressive transcendentalists—Hedge, Ripley, Parker, Follen, and perhaps Brownson—were, with the probable exception of the last-named, first stimulated by German thinking. They desired to popularize their highly unpopular transcendentalism, but could not do so by use of German sources because of the horror

¹ *Introduction to the Dial*, II, 115.

² Cf. Girard, p. 402, with Frothingham, *Ripley*, p. 46.

³ *Life of George Ticknor* (1876), I, 497-98.

most of the clergy felt for all German theology¹ and, more especially, because of obvious rhetorical difficulties. Hence they turned to the admirable French simplifications of the Germans and commended them habitually for those unskilled in German or in philosophy. The influence of Mme de Staël in attracting Americans to a further study of German thought is undoubted; but it is certain that before the *Critique of Pure Reason* was translated in 1838 several New Englanders and some transcendentalists had studied the work in the original. Mr. Girard is then justified in assuming an immediate French origin for the thinking of some minor transcendentalists, but not in trying to emphasize such an origin for the thought of the leaders of the movement, other than possibly W. E. Channing and Brownson. Since Brownson is praised so much—and very likely deservedly—by Mr. Girard, it is worth while to quote Hedge's statement concerning the members of the famous Transcendental Club: "Orestes Brownson met with us once or twice, but became unbearable, and was not afterward invited."² Channing had as early as 1816 sent inquiries to Ticknor concerning German metaphysics,³ and later was further influenced by Follen to admire the Germans, whom he could not read.

The reviewer's notion that the French writers with whom we are concerned were valued usually as potential popularizers fits in perfectly with passages of praise of them quoted by Mr. Girard.⁴ Especially is it clear that the writer quoted on p. 454 regards Degerando as best suited to the tired (New England!) business man in his family hours. Other passages might have been quoted to show regard for French writing and its popularizing power. S. Osgood, reviewing Ripley's *Specimens* in the *Christian Examiner* (XXVIII, 138), says: "The French, indeed, are masters of the intellectual mint; they understand how to give thought such shape that it will pass current. Commend us to the Germans for skill, ardor, and patience in digging out the precious metal from its depths, and to the English for readiness and talent to use it in actual business; but it must first pass through the French mint and take the form and beauty that fit it for practical purposes." This seems to present the usual view and to explain perhaps why Ripley's early *Specimens* were from French rather than German philosophers.

Mr. Girard is usually least happy in his anti-German efforts. He does succeed in showing that it is easy to overemphasize—and, for that matter, to underemphasize—direct influence from Kant and the greater German idealists. But it remains true that the movement is stamped "made in Germany." Mr. Girard seems to come close to a really important emphasis—and a rather new one—when he thinks the diffusion of German idealism in America due to such men as Herder, Schleiermacher, and De Wette

¹ See Rev. Daniel Dana in the *American Quarterly Register*, XI (August, 1838), 59; also Howe, *Life of Bancroft*, I, 55, 65, etc.

² Cooke, *Introduction to the Dial*, II, 73.

³ *Life of George Ticknor* (1876), I, 96.

⁴ Pp. 443, 454, 474, 477.

(p. 400). Portions of the works of all three of these were translated by New Englanders and were used in transcendental arguments. Ripley's account of the last two in his *Letters on the Latest Forms of Infidelity* is notably enthusiastic, and he published articles on all three men in the *Christian Examiner*. George Bancroft when in Berlin had been very intimate with Schleiermacher, whose abilities he greatly admired, while Follen and De Wette had worked in close association on the faculty of the University of Basle. But the greater Germans must have had influence as well—if not so much direct influence. Follen's outspoken praise of Kant in his "Inaugural" (1831), Hedge's important commendation of him in the *Christian Examiner* (XIV [March, 1833], 119-127), as well as Parker's opinion that Kant was "one of the profoundest thinkers in the world, though one of the worst writers, even of Germany"—all are conclusive as to the direct influence of Kant on some transcendentalists. It may have been difficult, as Clarke is quoted as saying (p. 398, note), to buy German books in Boston. No one has ever thought that German metaphysicians or theologians had a large public in New England, but it is certain that Hedge, Francis, Ripley, Parker, and a few others² would have all the books that need be presupposed. The predilection of Boston and Cambridge for things German was well enough known by 1825 so that Lafayette could call the region "la portion des Etats Unis où la littérature allemande est le plus en honneur."³

We must go back to the method of dealing carefully with the transcendentalists one by one. Then we shall find that their ideas came from many diverse places. W. E. Channing and Emerson derive perhaps from the least usual sources. Bancroft, Follen, Francis, Hedge, and Ripley were so steeped in German that it is useless to deny their Teutonic origins. Brownson is the loudest of the Gallophile group; while Margaret Fuller, though a faithful student of German literature, may well stand as representative of a class who were inspired and taught mainly by Americans. It is unnecessary to assume, with Mr. Girard, that only thinkers who held religious views entirely acceptable to transcendentalists influenced them; William Penn and even Jonathan Edwards⁴ were among those whose thinking was found to contain germs of intuitionism.

Mr. Girard, while taking an unwarrantably extreme position as to German influence on the transcendentalism of New England, has thrown definite light on the interesting part French influence played in the movement. For those who believe the movement essentially obscurantist it will be possible to give the Germans their due weight of influence without violating any present patriotic sensibilities.

GEORGE SHERBURN

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

¹ Weiss, *Life of Parker*, II, 454.

² See Appendix to Professor H. C. Goddard, *Studies in New England Transcendentalism*.

³ E. L. Follen, *Life of Charles Follen*, p. 92.

⁴ See Howe, *Life of George Bancroft*, I, 223, and Weiss, *Life of Parker*, I, 112, 141.